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ABSTRACT

Findings from a study that examined the relationship between the principal's faculty interaction behavior and school climate are presented in this paper. A total of 190 out of 250 Mississippi high school teachers responded to a survey that sought to determine if differences existed between ratings of their principal's staff interaction behaviors and their perceptions of school climate. Findings indicate that teachers held more favorable perceptions of their principal's staff interactions than of school climate, though both perceptions were positive. Other factors, such as holiday periods or district announcements, may account for teachers' perceptions of school climate. Overall, principals provided positive learning and working environments. (10 references) (LMI)

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School Climate and the Principal's Group Interaction Behavior

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The purpose of this brief research paper is to share the results of a study investigating whether the principal's behavior in interacting with the faculty is closely related to school climate. Stated as a question, the problem addressed is as follows: Do significant differences exist between teachers' ratings of their principal's group interaction behavior and their perceptions of school climate at the high school level?

Educational research indicates that there is no one single factor that accounts for a school being classified as effective. Studies indicate that the key to an effective school is the principal. Principals in effective schools are viewed by teachers and students as persons who are expert in a wide variety of areas concerning education and are identified as expert instructional leaders. In there schools, the levels of expectations for students held by the principals and teachers are unusually high, and the students tend to rise to these expectations in their performance. (Austin, 1979).

Schools with strong leadership have principals who are instrumental in setting the tone of the school, establishing instructional strategies, and organizing and distributing the schools' resources. (Edmonds, 1979).

School climate can determine the direction and implementation of all activities in the school setting. A positive school climate is the foundation

for effective learning and is best achieved through the cooperation of teachers, administrators, support staff members, and parents (Gunning, 1988).

A school's climate can be described as its atmosphere for learning. A positive school climate includes the feelings people have about school and whether it is a place where learning can occur. Two key school climate goals are productivity and satisfaction. The goal of productivity means that the school provides a wholesome, stimulating, and productive learning environment conducive to the academic and personal growth of students. The goal of satisfaction means that the school provides a pleasant and satisfying environment within which job satisfaction can be built (Howard, 1987).

Leadership behavior has long been thought to effect school quality. A major series of studies in school administration known as the Ohio State Leadership Studies led to the development of the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). This questionnaire abandoned the notion of leadership as a trait and attempted to concentrate instead on an analysis of the behavior of leaders. The LBDQ has been used in numerous studies to analyze the leadership behavior of school administrators. One major dimension of leadership behavior that emerged through use of the LBDQ has

been identified as initiating consideration. Consideration refers to an interactive relationship with the staff which implies friendship, cooperation, team work, rapport and approachability. Such a leader is thoughtfully considerate of staff members, essentially treating them as equals (Shartle, 1966). Bowers' and Seashore's (1966) work added additional credence to the Ohio study by identifying "interaction facilitation" as an important dimension of leadership closely related to consideration.

To be most effective, schools need to provide a climate that influences the way students learn. The school environment serves a crucial role in determining what the school is and what it might become (Norton, 1984). Current literature, however, does not address the interactive behavior of secondary school principals in relation to school climate.

Procedures

The specific study presented herein is a distillation of larger study conducted by Reginald L. Sykes (1991). The population for the study consisted of all public high school teachers in the state of Mississippi during the 1990-91 school year. A random sample of fifty public high schools where the principal had served at least one year was drawn from a State Department of Education list using a table of random numbers. The

principal of each school was asked to randomly select five teachers to complete the Group Interaction Scale instrument and the NASSP School Climate Survey. A total of one hundred ninety teachers' responses were received. Analysis of variance and multivariate analysis of variance were used to determine significant differences. The .05 confidence level was used to determine statistical significance.

The Group Interaction Scale was developed and validated by Lamar Moody and associates (1986) over a period of fifteen years. The NASSP School Climate Survey (1987) was developed at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. The instruments are designed for use with both students and adults.

Analysis of Data

The problem was to determine if significant differences exist between high school teachers' ratings of their principals on the Group Interaction Scale and their perceptions of the school climate as measured by the NASSP School Climate Survey.

In analyzing the data collected on teachers' ratings of group interaction behaviors of principals and their perceptions of school climate, a total score was tabulated for the Group Interaction Scale and School Climate Survey. Fifty was the maximum total score that could be obtained on both

instruments. The total score was used to establish total mean scores for each instrument.

The group Interaction Scale and School Climate Survey utilize similar Likert response scales. It was not necessary to convert raw scores to standard scores to analyze the data. The respondent's score on each item of the Group Interaction Scale and School Climate Survey received values of 1 to 5.

Teachers showed a higher total mean score (43.88) for the Group Interaction Scale than they did for the School Climate Survey (41.05) indicating that they were more positive toward their principal's interactive behavior than they were about their school's climate. Both scores, however, were positive.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it appears warranted to conclude that there is a significant difference between teachers' ratings of their principal's group interaction behavior and their perceptions of school climate. High school teachers hold more favorable perceptions of the group interaction behavior of their principal (i.e., their principal's positive interactions with staff) than they hold toward their school's climate. The

total mean score received on the GIS indicate principals, through their group interaction behaviors at school, provide the leadership desired by teachers and students. It can also be concluded that the total mean score obtained in the School climate Survey indicates an environment that is positive and healthy.

Factors (e.g., particular cycles of the school year such as holiday periods or district announcements) other than the leadership behavior of the principal which affect school climate may be the reason that the relationship between group interaction skills of secondary principals and positive school climate is not significantly related. Although it is not possible to show any definite relationship between teachers' perception of their principal's behavior in terms of group interaction skills and their perception of the climate of the school, it appears that principals who have positive interactions with their staffs create positive learning and working environments.

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